Tracts 1691. (1)

THE TIMES, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1912.

THE DOCTORS AND MR. LLOYD GEORGE.

REPLY OF THE ROYAL COLLEGES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—Mr. Lloyd George, in his speech at the London Opera House on February 12, singles out the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons from amongst numerous other important corporations and societies who followed the same course, for "refusing an invitation of a Government Department to discuss matters affecting the body they have been called into existence to represent." We will not comment on the language in which his criticism is couched, but we desire to point out that the occasion to which he refers was the first in which the opinion of the Royal Colleges was sought and that it was an invitation from the National Health Insurance Commissioners at unreasonably short notice, which gave inadequate opportunity for consulting the bodies concerned. The object of the conference was stated to be as follows:—"The point which it is specially desired to discuss relates to the selection of the medical members of the Advisory Committee by whom the Commissioners must be advised in the framing of the regulations in accordance with section 58 of the Act; and the Commissioners will also be glad to hear the views of those present on other matters of procedure in bringing the Act into operation which the representatives of the medical bodies may desire to bring forward."

Whether the replies sent by the two Royal Colleges can be rightly described as "curt, undignified, and discourteous" your readers can judge. They were as follows:—

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS.

The Royal College of Physicians is of opinion that the Insurance Act, as it stands, or even after any modifications which the Act empowers the Commissioners to make, is not adapted to secure the benefits of "insurance against loss of health" and "the prevention and cure of sickness," which are its stated objects; and further, that under this Act or any such modifications of it, it is not possible to obtain the co-operation of the medical profession without grave injury to their interests.

The College, therefore, though in complete sympathy with the objects of the Act with reference to the health of the community, is not prepared to accept the invitation to the Conference on February 2, for the purposes, as therein stated, of selection of medical members of the Advisory Committee, and upon other matters of procedure in bringing the Act into operation.

But should a suitable amending Act be proposed, whereby the primary purposes of this Act can be efficiently secured, the College would be prepared to render every possible assistance, bearing in mind those objects which it has always kept in view—namely, the promotion of the public health, the progress of medical science, and the proper interests of the medical profession.

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS.

The Council of the Royal College of Surgeons regret they are not prepared to send representatives to the meeting suggested by the National Health Insurance Commissioners.

The Council are of opinion that the administration of the medical benefits cannot be carried out under the Act with due regard to the interests of the public and the welfare of the medical profession, and that no satisfactory arrangement can be arrived at without an amending Act.

The Council would, however, be prepared to render any assistance in their power in the drafting of an amending Act for the provision of such amendments as are necessary to secure the co-operation of the medical profession.

We would point out that soon after the Bill was introduced into Parliament both the Royal Colleges approached the Government and clearly stated how, in their opinion, the Bill as it then stood militated against the just demands of the medical profession. A study of the Act shows how little attention was paid to these suggestions.

The invitation of the Commissioners was not, however, to discuss these matters, but to aid them in framing measures of procedure for the carrying out of an Act which the Royal Colleges have consistently maintained was injurious to large numbers of their licentiates and members, and thus to the insured persons and the community.

Whether it is an example of "rude ineptitude which is utterly without parallel, fortunately, in the history of this country" to decline such an invitation, we leave the public to decide. Some might think that such a description would more aptly be applied to those who initiated a measure vitally affecting the material and moral welfare of the medical profession without first consulting those bodies who represent its interests and are acquainted with the conditions under which its arduous work is carried on.

We are, Sir, your obedient servants,

THOMAS BARLOW, President of the Royal College of Physicians.
RICKMAN J. GODLEE, President of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Royal College of Surgeons of England, Lincoln's Inn-fields, W.C., Feb. 14.

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